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ABSTRACT

To help students in their adjustment to work, The Center for Vocational Education at Ohio State University has developed an instructional unit entitled, "Coping in the World of Work: Practice in Problem Solving." The unit is designed to: (1) acquaint students with the range of work entry and job adjustment problems they will encounter in making the transition from school to work, (2) familiarize students with the five-step problem solving approach, (3) apply the problem solving approach to real-life simulated practice problems, and (4) apply the problem solving approach to real problems outside the classroom. The five-step approach involves: (1) diagnosing the problem, (2) generating solutions, (3) evaluating the solutions, (4) choosing a solution, and (5) validating the solution. The unit involves each student in a variety of structured group experiences such as role-playing, "in-basket" exercises, sociodramas, case studies, and so forth designed to aid them in discovering their own courses of action in solving simulated problems. It also provides for expansion at a number of points, is flexible for teaching purposes, is low in overall cost, has been field tested over a two-year period, and is planned for 1976 availability. (Author)

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# Coping in the World of Work: Practice in Problem Solving

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Coping in the World of Work: Practice in Problem Solving

Successful entry into the labor force involves more than just marketable technical skills. Repeated studies have shown that poor performance on the job is frequently associated with non-technical adjustment behaviors such as work attitudes, work habits, and unrealistic aspirations. Several years ago, The Center for Vocational Education at The Ohio State University initiated a programmatic effort to alleviate this problem. The initial series of studies were descriptive in that they were designed to identify worker adjustment problems of youth as they moved from school to work. The descriptive studies surveyed worker adjustment problems as reported by:

(1) vocational teachers in cooperative programs;

(2) youth opportunity center counselors; and

(3) young workers on the job

Out of this programmatic effort two monographs were developed: the first analyzed and described vocational coping problems of youth and the second explored the intervention strategies that can be used as educational materials in vocational training programs to facilitate a student's resourcefulness and adaptability in effectively adjusting to the world of work. It was intended at the time that the strategies would be developed and packaged as a usable instructional unit for eleventh and twelfth grade students. The strategy used in problem analysis was conducted by two major methods:

(1) an extensive search of both published and unpublished studies; and

(2) visitations with job placement agencies and consultants.

In many cases, the empirical research literature represented direct access to those involved in youth worker adjustment such as supervisors, placement officers, the young workers per se, and teachers. Hence, the problems suggested are in many cases "gut level" observations as well as indirect observations through traditional data collection instrumentation. The literature search included a thorough examination of the following:

Psychological Abstracts
Sociological Abstracts
A Computerized ERIC Search of Youthful Worker Adjustment Problems
Education Index
The Journal of Social Issues
The Annual Review of Psychology
Poverty and Human Resources Abstracts
Manpower Abstracts, Monographs, and Journals
Selected major texts in the fields of industrial and vocational psychology and occupational sociology

The types of problems are divided into four (4) separate areas to facilitate remembering the general categories. The first area is career planning and training problems and involves:

(1) Educational Preparation - deals with the usefulness of a comprehensive general education to give the worker essential reading and

mathematics skills as well as training in marketable skills in order to acquire and hold a job.

(2) Occupational Aspirations and Job Expectations - discrepancies between what a worker expects to find on the job and what actually exists.

(3) Occupational Mobility - horizontal or vertical job movement over time.

(4) Geographic Mobility - problems arising with the difficulties inherent in moving from place to place although long term gains may be in the offing.

The second area is job getting problems and involves:

(1) Job Seeking - general resources and strategies used by youth to obtain employment.

(2) Interview and Test Taking - deals with the modalities by which self-representation may be optimized.

(3) Job Placement - deals with the usefulness of a comprehensive general education to give the worker essential reading and mathematics skills as well as training in marketable skills in order to acquire and hold a job.

(4) Prior Work Experience - difficulties in gaining experience without being hired, i.e., the company desires an experienced worker but the worker will not have experience without the company hiring him or her.

(5) Work Habits - basically, the way in which a worker performs his or her tasks including organization, neatness, punctuality, and care of equipment and materials.

(6) Alienation - a state of estrangement in which the individual may perceive himself as powerless to control his or her own destiny.

(7) Peer and Supervisory Adjustment - includes social and emotional relationships with colleagues as well as the ability to give and receive orders and instructions.

Finally, the fourth area is off the job adjustment problems and involves:

(1) Family and Personal Situational Adjustment - refers to interactive effects of personal problems, home life, other social relations off the job and the actual job itself.

(2) Attitudes and Values - a catch-all category that includes factors affecting work attitudes such as maturity, sense of responsibility, and personality.

(3) Self-Image - this concept of self-regard or self-esteem emphasizes the necessity to provide congruence between a worker's abilities and his or her own self-perceptions.

Through further research into the training methods and intervention strategies relevant for work entry problems of youth it became obvious that a need existed for a "model" to deal with these problems. Ultimately, an adaptation of a five-step problem solving approach from the work of D'Zurilla and Goldfried in behavior modification and problem solving was utilized. As developed, the five-step problem solving approach involves:

(1) diagnosing the problem;

(2) generating alternative solutions;

(3) evaluating those solutions;

(4) choosing one solution; and

(5) validating (testing) the solution

Once the theoretical foundations were laid, it became necessary to devise a vehicle to communicate the range of problems that students will encounter as they make the transition from school to work as well as the five-step problem solving approach. Previous research indicated that perhaps the most viable approach would be to use case studies.

In the Spring of 1973, a pilot test was set up at a local vocational school using the case studies devised previously. The results of the pilot test were extremely productive both in terms of looking at the impact of our methods upon students as well as attempting to assess the transferability of the five-step process to actual work situations. This latter procedure was accomplished by sending questionnaires to the participants after they had graduated and been working on their jobs for a

few months. All of the data obtained, i.e., student critique forms, teacher log, staff observer's log, etc., were tabulated and used in making the revisions necessary to begin the formative product engineering phase of the unit.

The second phase of research and development was also accomplished at the same local vocational center one year later during the Spring of 1974. The approach this time used a variety of structured group experiences such as role-playing, sociodramas, brainstorming exercises, in-basket techniques, and the like in addition to case studies. Again, drawing on data analysis involving student/teacher critiques, staff observation and follow-up questionnaires as well as reviews by internal and external consultants, revisions were made for the summative product engineering phase of testing.

The last testing phase was accomplished at three field sites in Denver, Colorado, one site in Cincinnati and two sites in Columbus. The experimental methodology involved a pretest, posttest control group design using intact classes of students. The data from this test is currently under analysis and preparations are underway for final revisions. The product is now due for completion December 1, 1975 and will become available to schools throughout the country by 1976. The final product will cost each school between $75 and $100 and will include filmstrips, slides, instructor's manual, student guides and handout materials. It is intended that the unit be self-instructional for the teacher as no additional training will be provided. In addition, it is completely reusable and

provides spirit masters for any consummable items such as self-checks.

In sum, "Coping in the World of Work: Practice in Problem Solving" is a prepackaged unit that deals with the range of problems students will encounter in making the transition from school to work and teaches them to cope with those problems using a five-step problem solving approach.